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PROPOSED DCI TALKING POINTS ON SOVIET LEADERSHIP SCENE

Chernenko's appearance on live TV suggests he is not likely to die in the immediate future.

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The political battle for the succession is certainly heating up, however.

August saw a major rumor campaign about Chernenko's imminent demise. Given its control of contacts with foreigners, the KGB was probably the major institution behind this.

At the same time a labored effort was made by Chernenko partisans in the central apparatus to keep his name in the public eye and they probably contrived the cosmonaut ceremony to help quell rumors about his health.

Gorbachev's standing as the "heir apparent" is more pronounced than ever before in Soviet history. But his accession to the General Secretaryship will not be automatic, far less his consolidation of the power needed to lead and address Soviet problems over the longer run.

On the contrary a major and probably protracted personal and factional battle for power appears to be underway. It is likely to persist for some time even if Gorbachev becomes General Secretary in the next several months.

For now it looks like Gorbachev versus Romanov.

Gorbachev has several advantages.

Good politician and manager, probably looked to as one who can reform aspects of management while preserving central control.

Strong influence over party appointments now.

The candidate of the "Andropov faction", with probable backing of the KGB.

Romanov looks like he was brought into the Secretariat in June 1983 by Chernenko's allies in the central and regional apparatus to counterbalance Gorbachev.

From the Secretariat he supervises defense industry -- and may therefore have ties to Ustinov -- and also the KGB and regular police -- and may in this role keep them from helping Gorbachev the way they helped Andropov.

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The contours of the present infighting cannot be described with confidence. We can say with more confidence that the outlook favors a hard and probably protracted contest, with darkhorses perhaps appearing in the months and years ahead.

This is because the present front runners now lack the firm political bases to assure them the General Secretary's post once Chernenko dies or to consolidate power once they get the job.

There is a perceptible difference between Gorbachev's and Romanov's rhetorical records on policy toward the US.

Gorbachev has signaled an inclination toward slightly more flexible policies.

Romanov's record is uniformly hardline.

These differences are probably not germane to real policy choice.

During the struggle for power, all contenders are likely to take refuge in hardline postures, while trying to fault the competition with deviations of some kind.

Once in power, any of the candidates is likely to experiment with more flexible policies than we have recently seen.

But none have so far given signs of willingness to sacrifice Soviet foreign and military ambitions.

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